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Towards a History of the Literary Cultures in East-Central Europe: Theoretical Reflections

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Towards a History of the Literary Cultures in East-Central Europe: Theoretical Reflections

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Historical approaches to literature and culture have experienced a remarkable revival in the last decades, accompanied by severe critiques of past historiographies. The new approaches reject the positivist and orthodox Marxist traditions that regard literature as a mimetic reflection of an underlying "reality," "internalist" histories that isolate the discipline from the surrounding culture, Hegelian, organicist, and teleological generalizations of periods and cultures, reductive national perspectives, and, last but not least, histories dominated by "grand narratives." But if there is a reasonable consensus on the critique of the past, new histories have been slow in coming and controversial when published. Witness the series that the International Comparative Literature Association (ICLA) has been preparing on the history of literature in the European languages, and the French literary history that Denis Hollier and his collaborators have published—both of which we shall discuss later in this paper.

The following essay delineates the contours of an ongoing project on the history of the literary cultures in East-Central Europe, which will be published by John Benjamins Press in three volumes. The principles of the series to which these volumes belong were outlined by its general editors, Linda Hutcheon and Mario Valdés, in *Rethinking Literary History—Comparatively*

(ACLS Occasional Paper No. 27); the outlines of the sister volumes were given by Linda Hutcheon, Djelal Kadir, and Mario J. Valdés in *Collaborative Historiography: A Comparative Literary History of Latin America* (ACLS Occasional Paper No. 35). The East-Central European project involves some 120 scholars, who contributed about 200 articles. (For Table of Contents, see Appendix.) Fellowships at the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study (NIAS) allowed five contributors to work on the project during the academic year 1999/2000.

I. Defining the Region

In June 1989, just a few months prior to the great political turnover, a round-table discussion on Central Europe took place in Budapest, involving the writers H.C. Artmann, Péter Esterházy, Danilo Kiš, György Konrád, Claudio Magris, Czesław Miłosz, Adam Michnik and others. Miłosz defined Central Europe in his opening paper as "all the countries [including the Baltic states] that in August 1939 were the real or hypothetical object of a trade between the Soviet Union and Germany" (The Budapest Round-Table 18), but Artmann indignantly objected that the Baltic countries belonged to Scandinavia and his country, Austria, was omitted, just because it was lucky enough to regain independence in 1955 (22). His responses shifted the context from 1939 to the post-war period, but the implications are clear: Artmann meant that Austria was a Central-European country and Miłosz had no right to identify Central Europe with the Soviet-dominated countries of Eastern Europe. To this, Claudio Magris remarked that Central Europe was not identical with the German historico-political designation of *Mitteleuropa*. The latter connoted "the encounter of German culture with the other cultures of the same region, but its predominant implication was that of a German or at best German-Hungarian supremacy in Central Europe" (29).

We perceive a similar problem in a very useful recent study, whose German translation appeared under the straightforward

itle *Mitteleuropa. Auf den Spuren eines Begriffs [Central Europe: Tracing a Concept]*, but carried the ambiguous original French title *'Europe Centrale—L'Idée germanique de Mitteleuropa [Central Europe— The German Idea of Mitteleuropa]*. Like Magris, the uthor, Jacques le Rider, presumably means that the untranslatable German *Mitteleuropa* does not translate as *Europe Centrale*, ut this becomes evident in the text only; the meaning of the itle depends on the punctuation inserted between the main-nd the subtitle.

Discussions on the eastern part of Europe frequently bog down n such terminological and conceptual quagmires: *Mitteleuropa, Central Europe, Eastern Europe, East-Central Europe* each imply lifferent borders and, above all, a different set of perspectives and onnotations. We must first define and justify our terminology.

Mitteleuropa

Mitteleuropa represents a German perspective on both the eastern art of Europe and Germany itself. Whenever Germans conceived f themselves as Mitteleuropäer, they took a middle ground etween East and West and defined their identity as much by elations to the former as to the latter. The earliest manifestations f that interest were the German religious and commercial enetration of north-eastern Europe in the twelfth to the ourteenth centuries, a series of individual, unplanned and requently accidental events, which nineteenth-century historians ave reinterpreted as a systematic imperial *Drang nach Osten* (a ind of *Eastward ho!*) (Le Rider 24). In modern times, Le Rider uggests, *Mitteleuropa* acquired significance whenever German ulture experienced a crisis or underwent a deep transformation of ts geopolitical identity: after the Thirty-Years War, after Napoleon, nd after the creation of a German Reich in 1871 (9-10).

The term moved into the center of discussion during World War I, when, in view of the military alliance between the Reich and the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, Friedrich Naumann 1860-1919) envisioned a post-war *Mitteleuropa* uniting Germany, he Monarchy, and in a broader sense all the nations "that elong neither to the Anglo-French western alliance nor to the

Russian Empire" (Naumann, *Central Europe* 9). He anticipated the emergence of two long trenches or Chinese walls after the war, one stretching from the Lower Rhine to the Alps, the other from Courland to either the right or left of Romania, and predicted that a third trench dividing Germany and Austria-Hungary would not be needed (16). Within a year, the book sold more than 100,000 copies and became Germany's greatest best seller after Bismarck's Memoirs.

Naumann began as a Lutheran minister with a Christian-socialist conscience; only later did he become a politician concerned about Germany's power in the world. His pre-war advocacy of Germany's colonial expansion made him a "liberal imperialist" (Wolfgang Schieder in Naumann, *Werke* 375). Theodor Heuss, the first president of the Federal Republic, worked for Naumann in his youth and published a comprehensive biography of him in 1937. Today, he is regarded as a forefather of German liberalism, and the cultural foundation of the German liberal party, the FDP, carries his name. Yet the ideology behind Naumann's vision is troubling, even if (or perhaps, precisely because) his leading principle sounds familiar in an age of globalization: "The spirit of large-scale industry and super-national organization has seized politics" (*Central Europe* 4). For Naumann, bigger was better, more beautiful, more efficient, and better equipped in the struggle for survival, not only in the realm of economics but also in inter-national politics. Small nations could not remain sovereign: a Czech army, a Croatian Chief of Staff, an exclusively Hungarian Foreign Ministry, a Slovenian economic policy, or a Galician treasury would be impossible (*Central Europe* 33).

Naumann's ideology of globalization diverges, then, after all from today's trend, for the formations he names, except for the Galician treasury, have recently been established—in spite of the economic trend towards the dissolution of inefficient small units. In Naumann's vision, the economic principle ranks still higher than in ours, for today's principle of globalization is partly balanced by the political principle of self-determination, which was the force behind the disintegration of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, and which continues to operate today in Indonesia

nd elsewhere. Naumann had little sympathy for this principle of
elf-determination. In his view, the German Empire was founded
on the German national ideal. The Prussian Poles, rather numerous
it that time, could be a difficult problem for statesmanship, but,
ie thought, "they are neither so numerous nor so powerful as to
come into consideration as partners in the Government" (*Central
Europe* 20). Of course, he realized that the ethnic movements
of the Monarchy represented a serious threat to his imaginary
Mitteleuropa, but he vastly underestimated the forces fighting
or independence. The Hungarians, he thought, understood that
they could remain independent only if they relied on a major
non-Slavic, i.e., German, power (*Central Europe* 27 ff.). He
admitted that the Slavs and the Romanians had less to expect
from the merger of the Monarchy with Germany, but he hoped
that their dislike of the Russians would drive them into the
arms of a Mitteleuropa in the hope of extracting advantages
from it (*Central Europe* 27).

Naumann lived to see the end of the war and he entered the
Weimar National Assembly as a founding member of the German
Democratic Party. But though he helped establishing the Weimar
Republic, he was unwilling to give up his vision of Mitteleuropa.
On March 23, 1919, he would still write to the geographer
Hermann Rüdiger:

> [I]f an ordered culture of these regions is to
> be maintained or regained the leaders of these
> nations must seek to join with us for geographic
> and economic reasons, against hateful populist
> sentiments. If the idea of Mitteleuropa was in itself
> correct [. . .] then it will not die out completely in
> today's crisis. (in Heuß 634)

A remarkable comment, full of blindness and insight! Of insight,
because the national leaders should indeed have considered
transnational affiliations and reconciliations; of blindness, because
in times of hateful populist sentiments geographic and economic
reasons are hardly persuasive and a German-led Mitteleuropa was
no viable alternative to ethnic chauvinism.

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Mitteleuropa looked different from an Austrian perspective. For Metternich, who had no interest in expanding the Habsburg Empire eastward, it meant a European balance of power with a Danubian Habsburg territory in the center. Once Germany was united under Prussian leadership, Austria was forced to shift eastward in the compromise of 1867, at the cost of creating a problematic multicultural state. Naumann's idea could not muster much support, but some Austrians contemplated different Mitteleuropas. Perhaps most important among them was the writer Hugo von Hofmannsthal, who spoke of an Austrian-centered spiritual Mitteleuropa well before the publication of Naumann's book. In a speech of October 31, 1916, entitled *Österreich im Spiegel seiner Dichtung [Austria in the Mirror of its Literature]*, Hofmannsthal presented his ideas of an Austrian alternative to Naumann's Mitteleuropa. He continued his attempts to define a new cultural identity for Austria and the surrounding areas with the founding of the Salzburg Festival and a steady stream of speeches and essays throughout the 1920s. While his intellectual and artistic Mitteleuropa was in many respects more attractive (if also more naïve) than Naumann's, it too was seriously flawed, for it turned away from politics, innocently appealing to dangerous mystifying concepts. Thus, the Salzburg Festival was to be a cultural expression of a "Bavarian-Austrian tribe" *(Stamm)*; the crisis of the twenties was to be overcome by a "conservative revolution" and a new *Reich*. For the right-wing historian Heinrich von Srbik, similar notions served to warm up ideas of Metternich's Mitteleuropa.

Hitler's Anschluß and the neutralization of Austria in 1955 silenced such speculations and dreams for a while, but Mitteleuropa stayed alive among exiled East-European writers, became a hot topic during the *glasnost* in the eighties, and generated a wave of nostalgia about Vienna, Austria, and the Monarchy after the collapse of the Soviet empire. Germany's center of gravity shifted to the East through reunification, but this has revived and intensified Polish and Czech preoccupations with German hegemony. And the well-intended but highly questionable German role in the disintegration of Yugoslavia has fed similar fears in the Balkans.

We agree with Magris that *Mitteleuropa* (and to a lesser degree *Zentraleuropa* and *Central Europe*) is a historically loaded term that focalizes the eastern part of Europe from a predominantly German perspective, with explicit or implicit hegemonic intentions. When Naumann wrote his book, a certain transnational middle-European culture was still alive in the rich German and Yiddish cultures stretching from the Baltic Sea to the Danube delta, with centers in Prague, Budapest, Lemberg, Vilnius, Czernowitz and elsewhere. That culture, epitomized for us by the names of Franz Kafka and Franz Werfel, Paul Celan and Rosa Ausländer, Elias Canetti, Joseph Roth and Karl Franzos, Sholem Aleichem, Rainer Maria Rilke, and Robert Musil, also included hundreds of newspapers, journals, theaters, and cultural societies. German, and especially German-Jewish culture acted as a glue, an integrating force, among the various ethnic groups.

These seeds of a German yet genuinely transnational East European culture were burned in Auschwitz, uprooted when the Germans were ethnically cleansed after the war in Eastern Europe, and further decimated during the Jewish exodus of the last decades. A German-oriented *Mitteleuropa* concept is applicable in historical studies that stress the German and Yiddish cultures of the region, but the disappearance of these cultures makes a present- or future-oriented use of the term either vacuous or a euphemism for a new German imperialism. A German-oriented concept of *Mitteleuropa* is not the appropriate means to achieve the reconciliation that the nations and ethnic groups of Eastern Europe genuinely need. More appropriate is the pressure that the European Union exerts on the various countries seeking admission to the Union. Ultimately, however, reconciliation must come through a revision of the self-image that these various cultures have constructed of themselves in the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Eastern Europe

If *Mitteleuropa* is both linguistically and ideologically oriented towards the German cultures, *Eastern Europe* gives undue emphasis

to Russian hegemonic policies. As Larry Wolff has shown, the term was introduced in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when east/west distinctions became more important in Europe than the traditional north/south ones:

> The polarization of Europe between Italy and the northern barbarians, so obvious to the ancient Romans, so convenient to the Renaissance Italians, survived into the eighteenth century as a rhetorical form. William Coxe, publishing in 1785 his *Travels into Poland, Russia, Sweden, and Denmark,* could still sum them up as "my travels through the Northern kingdoms of Europe." Yet this geographical perspective had begun to appear seriously anachronistic, and it was the intellectual work of the Enlightenment to bring about that modern reorientation of the continent which produced Western Europe and Eastern Europe. Poland and Russia would be mentally detached from Sweden and Denmark, and associated instead with Hungary and Bohemia, the Balkan lands of Ottoman Europe, and even the Crimea on the Black Sea. (5)

This invention of Eastern Europe during the Enlightenment, mostly by the French philosophes, acquired new meanings during the Cold War (1945-1989), when the region became associated with the Iron Curtain and the "Soviet bloc," including the GDR. While the Iron Curtain is now lifted, Eastern Europe remains a highly problematic designation, first, because historical usage has associated it with the hegemonic sphere of Russia and the Soviet Union, second, because it has no clear Eastern borders, save the purely geographical divide of the Ural Mountains. Robert Pynsent's pioneering *Reader's Encyclopedia of Eastern European Literature* (1993) took the geographic designation literally and included in the volume Georgian, Armenian and other literatures that are seldom regarded as European. Such an adaptation of a geographical designation is perhaps justified in an encyclopedia

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where the entries follow each other alphabetically, but it would make little sense in the project to be described here, which foregrounds literary relations, since the last mentioned Eastern literatures had historically little contact with the European literatures west of Russia.

Defining East-Central Europe

East-Central Europe, a relatively recent, and geographically somewhat vague term, was probably introduced to avoid the undesirable historical connotations of the alternatives. The most ambitious attempt to define it historically is a little-known article by the Hungarian historian Jenö Szücs of 1983, which develops the ideas of István Bibó's long-suppressed and now classic study *A kelet-europai kisállamok nyomorusága [The Poverty of the Small States in Eastern Europe]* (1946). Both Bibó and Szücs are concerned with the (lack of) democratic traditions in the region. Bibó, writing on the eve of the Cold War, speaks of Eastern Europe, while Szücs, writing on the eve of *perestroyka,* wants to peel off an East-Central segment from the East, admitting that it fell behind the West in developing its democratic traditions but claiming that it is, nevertheless, more democratic than the Europe east of it.

Szücs's subtle and densely argued piece received less attention than it may deserve, and his vision of the historical development may never be accepted. But one may adopt the term without his assumptions, and define the region with different arguments. For our purposes the unifying feature of *East-Central Europe* is the struggle of its peoples against the German and Russian hegemonic threats. In this sense, the region is a liminal and transitional space between the powers in the west and the east, a long but relatively narrow strip stretching from the Baltic countries in the north to Macedonia in the south. In the west it is clearly bounded by the hegemonic German cultures of Germany and Austria; its eastern boundaries are less distinct, for the populations of the Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldavia were both part of Russia's hegemonic power and suppressed by it.

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But we must qualify this definition of East-Central Europe in terms of the hegemonic powers east and west of it, by several additional factors that contributed to the present composition of the region. The first is the impact of the Turks, who occupied its southern part for centuries and decisively contributed to the shaping of the Balkans. They left behind a twofold legacy that still plays a crucial role in the region: a large Muslim population, and a wealth of national myths, legends, and literary creations about fighting the Turkish invaders, which continues to shape the region's notions of ethnicity and nation. Witness the function of the Kosovo myths in recent conflicts. The present literary history of East-Central Europe covers, for pragmatic reasons, only the last two centuries, yet it has to deal with the literary afterlife of the Turkish occupation, because of the revival of folklore and the construction of foundational texts during the nineteenth and early twentieth century. The analogous objection concerning the northernmost, Baltic part of the region is less problematic: while Swedish power did play an important role here, it was by no means as decisive as the Turkish one in the Balkans. Struggle against German and Russian political, commercial, and cultural interests has been as crucial for the history of the region as for the region lying south of it.

Defining East-Central Europe as a region struggling against its neighboring hegemonic powers diverts attention from the internal differences and internecine conflicts and wars. The region's remarkable ethnic, linguistic, and religious variety led to emancipatory struggles that were as often directed against powers within as against the external hegemonic powers. The Hungarian struggle against Habsburg power was, for instance, paralleled by the struggle of the minorities in Hungary against Hungarian hegemony. When in 1827 Hungarian was made the language of instruction in schools, this was a victory for the Hungarians against the Habsburgs, but a blow to the Slovak, Croatian, and Romanian struggles to emancipate their language. Similar clashes between hegemonic and minority interests had finally doomed Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. This complicates rather than invalidates attempts to conceptualize an East-Central Europe. The

process of identity forming may have created a variety of conflicts among the ethnic groups, but it was fairly uniform throughout the region and it paradoxically also interrelated these cultures. The national accounts of the region's history systematically ignore or suppress the intra-regional connections and exchanges.

II. The National Literature Projects

The first modern historians of literature were the romantic writers August Wilhelm Schlegel, Friedrich Schlegel, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who gave public lectures on the history of European literature in the early nineteenth century. University chairs for the modern languages and literatures did not exist then as yet. Indeed, the universities were not eager to accommodate writers and literary scholars. The University of Jena, surely the most hospitable one at that time to the literati, allowed Schiller to teach history and Goethe to administrate, but it rejected the Schlegel brothers, who gave their public lectures in Berlin, Paris, Vienna and elsewhere, outside the universities. August Wilhelm Schlegel did finally hold the first German chair for literature *(Literatur und die schöne Wissenschaften)* at the University of Bonn in 1818, but his brother and Coleridge never received university appointments.

University chairs for modern literatures were gradually established in many European countries during the first half of the nineteenth century, but this institutionalization had a price. The academic study of literature was to provide the histories and textbooks for teaching the modern languages and literatures in schools: the institutionalization of literary studies became part of unwritten but powerful national agendas. The shift from a cosmopolitan to a national approach is evident in Friedrich Schlegel's last series of public lectures, given in Vienna in 1812. Schlegel, by now in the service of Metternich, declared here that the foremost business of poetry was "to preserve and to glorify those great national memories that are in the dim past of a national

history" (6:15). Literature and literary scholarship acquired a political justification, and social as well as academic prestige by becoming the keeper of the national soul.

Conventional wisdom holds that literature was first institutionalized in western Europe and only later in its "backward" eastern and southern parts. Yet the institutionalization of literature was a question of national identity rather than economics. It progressed relatively slowly in nations that had a robust self-image, including England and France, Europe's most stable and industrially advanced nations. Gustave Lanson finally published the first great French literary history in 1895, when France was still smarting from its defeat by Prussia in 1870-71. Literature was first institutionalized in societies that had problematic identities: Germany, Italy, some Scandinavian, and most East-Central European cultures. Constructing a national literature was in these areas a major contribution to the struggle for a national language, culture, and political independence. Vernacular literature was often a *prelude* to state formation and even a *precondition* for it; literary histories of Gervinus and others envisaged a unified German state but preceded its actual creation. Germany had in this respect a paradoxical role: key ideas about a national literature originated with Herder and the German romantics, but were then used in the national awakenings of Poland, Bohemia, Slovakia, Hungary and other East-Central European countries against the domination of German language and literature. Germany aggravated its identity problem by exporting it eastward.

As mentioned, the national awakenings were not directed at the great external powers alone. The Hungarian national awakening and its state-supported projects for a Hungarian national literature soon had to confront the national awakening of the country's minorities. To complicate matters even further, the "national community" could often be imagined in different configurations. In the Slavic countries, for instance, competing national projects emerged, because the nation could be conceived on a pan-Slavic scale, or in terms of federations like Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, or again in terms of smaller units. In his first literary history, Ferenc Toldy could still conceive of Hungarian literature as everything

written in any language within the country's borders. By the end of the nineteenth century such liberal conceptions of the national all but disappeared.

According to Ernest Gellner, nationalism "*invents* nations where they do not exist" (169). In East-Central Europe, poets and philologists were major contributors to this invention by constructing *texts* as well as *institutions*. The text construction consisted of 1) writing dictionaries; 2) reviving the vernacular poetry; 3) (re)constructing the national literary past, by publishing the oral poetry and the medieval and baroque vernacular literature; 4) writing new national epics and historical fiction; 5) canonizing national poets; and, last but not least, 6) writing national literary histories.

The language revival that initiated the national literary project is associated in Hungary with the name of Ferenc Kazinczy, in Czech culture with that of Joseph Dobrovsky, and in the Serbian with that of Vuk Karadzić. The latter two wrote, among other things, dictionaries. As in the case of Kazinczy's *Magyar Museum* (1788-) and *Orpheus* (1790), the language revival was often furthered by new journals. The revival was usually divisive, for a cosmopolitan elite continued to regard itself as part of the hegemonic (more "advanced" and "refined") foreign culture, while the innovators sought to revitalize the vernacular, the local, and the ethnic. Although the elite usually came from the aristocracy, and the opposition from the bourgeoisie and the lower middle class, the groups did not divide neatly along class lines, for some of the most powerful reformers were aristocrats.

The language revival was furthered everywhere by the appearance of new poets of the vernacular (e.g. Kazinczy). But the main movers of the national literary program were philologists, who often limped behind the poets by relying on pre-symbolist and even pre-romantic notions of literature. Thus the first historians of Hungarian and Bulgarian literature, Toldy and Teodorov-Balan respectively, both defined literature in terms of its eighteenth-century meaning as *all* oral and written texts. For them, literature had not yet differentiated itself from the discourse of ideas, and not yet enclosed itself in what Michel Foucault calls

"radical intransitivity" (300). These philologists contributed to the national program in three main ways. First, they dug into the national past, recovering from it forgotten vernacular texts. Many of the recovered texts were heroic songs and ballads about ancient struggles against invaders. The recovery of the Serb heroic epic in the early nineteenth century, enthusiastically greeted by Goethe, led in every culture to a search for similar lost poetry. But the finally published texts were no discoveries or rediscoveries, for the "finding" was not by serendipity: the editing and publishing was shaped by a national demand for foundational texts that would project a proper national self-image. The published text was a product of the nineteenth century, often even a forgery. Most notorious was the case of the *Rukopis Královédvorský*, which Václav Hanka published in 1819, claiming that he found them in a cellar of the castle of Dvůr Králové nad Labem two years earlier. Later it came to light that the poems were written by Hanka and his friend J. Linda to prove that the Czechs heroic songs were a match for the Serbian ones. Whether other oral poetry was also a forgery is still hotly debated, but clearly, the national epic songs and folklore published in the nineteenth century were manipulated by the philologists, who perceived it as their task to inspire the nation with ancient patriotic texts. Ethnic differences, rarely thematized in folktales, became dramatized in the process of editing to help invent a national tradition (Stagl 1235).

The philologists also republished medieval and Baroque texts, which often represented glorious chapters in the national history. Above all, they canonized national poets. In the early phases of constructing a national literature this usually meant the revival of an older poet; in the later phases it amounted to the apotheosis of a nineteenth-century one. All peoples of East-Central Europe manufactured in this way national icons: the Hungarians glorified Sándor Petőfi (original name Petrović; 1823-49), the Poles Adam Miczkiewicz (1798-1855), the Serbs and the Montenegrian Petar Njegos (1813-51), the Czechs Karel Mácha (1810-36), the Romanians Mihai Eminescu (1850-1889), the Bulgarians Hristo Botev (1848-76), and the Slovenes France Prešeren (1800-49). The philologists were the sculptors of these national monuments.

The philological contribution to the national project culminated in the writing of national literary histories that integrated founding texts, the revival of medieval texts, the story of the language revival, and the canonization of national poets into single grand narratives. What Croce said about De Sanctis's *Storia della letteratura italiana* (1870-71) holds true for most of the others: "a history, whose protagonist was precisely Italian literature, even Italy; the individual writers were presented only as phases in the general development" (de Sanctis 2: 433). Indeed, de Sanctis had dreamt of writing a history of Italian literature as a history of Italy from early on (de Sanctis 2: 421). National literary histories became uplifting accounts of the nation's spiritual fortunes. The Polish literary historian Piotr Chmielowski remarked in 1899 that he cannot reconstruct the soul of the whole nation, but he would offer hints "about the changes it underwent, as reflected in the literature of the last nine centuries" (*Historya* 23; 1899). Others saw their task in similar terms.

National literary histories had archetypal structures and stock roles that could be filled by different heroes and villains. The nation assumed in these grand narratives the role of a collective hero or "logical subject" (Ricoeur 1: 197). Its birth, growth, maturing, and decline was recounted in an organic development, where each stage followed from the previous ones. Though the biological metaphor endowed these histories (explicitly or implicitly) with an element of inevitability, the line was not necessarily linear; the trajectory could include jumps, reversals, returns, clean slates, or new beginnings. Indeed, the story could be cast into different generic forms, and assume the shape of a divine comedy, a Bildungsroman, a drama of fate, or even a national Golgotha. Common to all these scenarios was merely the demand that elements threatening the integrity of the story be suppressed or excluded, for, as Ernest Renan remarked, collective amnesia is as important to a nation as shared remembrances (892). Forgetting historical errors and everything else that may disturb a nation's glorified self-image are "essential factors in creating a nation" (891). The historians of national literatures were committed to causality, coherence, and teleology, and felt compelled to suppress whatever perceptions did not fit into their plot construction (20).

Founding and developing literary institutions were as important as constructing texts. National awakenings began with journals and newspapers, perhaps also patriotically oriented publishing houses, theater groups, and societies for the cultivation of the native language and its poetry. Such initiatives were often taken first in the provinces, but in the later phases the institutional projects were usually carried out in the capital. The primary aim then became the establishment of nationally representative institutions, which were to become both vehicles and symbols of the national culture. Hence the emergence of national academies, the universities, libraries, and theaters. Each of these institutions assumed a specific literary function within the national project. The task of the academy was to nurture and guard the language, to generate dictionaries, to further the production of literary histories and textbooks, and to establish guidelines for the instruction of the national language and literature on the secondary and university levels. The universities assumed the task of training the teachers of literature in secondary and higher education and of generating literary histories, textbooks, and other handbooks. The most popular of the national institutions, the national theater, was to stimulate the writing of dramas about the national past, whose production would then become communal self-celebrations of the nation. Writers could then, in turn, celebrate the opening night of a national theater in fiction, as Mór Jókai did in the opening chapter of *Kárpáthy Zoltán* (1854).

The institutionalization of literature enhanced the national character of the capital city, and turned it into a symbol of the nation. "Every nation has a holy city of which it thinks with piety and pride," writes Jókai in the same *Kárpáthy Zoltán* (142), where he tells about the great flooding of Pest in 1838. Yet these cities of national pride were also a gathering place of foreigner writers and intellectuals, and sites of cosmopolitanism. Every East-Central European capital city had its German-language newspaper (the venerable *Pester Lloyd* of Budapest was published from 1853 until World War II), its German theater, and often its Yiddish one as well. Capital cities also attracted the writers and intellectuals from

the minorities and the neighboring countries. In short, they were not only the fulcrum of the national literary culture but also forces of cultural dispersion and diversification. Reacting to this, East-Central European countries witnessed populist rural movements that glorified the countryside and the healthy roots of the national oral culture, vilifying the capital city's cosmopolitan culture, its industrial gloom, its decadence, and its immigrant Germans, Jews, and other foreigners. The young Béla Bartók, who later fought for intercultural understanding, could write on August 15, 1905 to Irmy Jurkovics: "A real Hungarian music can originate only if there is a real <u>Hungarian</u> gentry. This is why the Budapest public is so absolutely hopeless. The place has attracted a haphazardly heterogeneous, rootless group of Germans and Jews; they make up the majority of Budapest's population. It's a waste of time trying to educate them in a national spirit. Much better to educate the [Hungarian] provinces" (Letters 50).

The national literary projects assumed a double function and were Janus faced: they were movements of liberation and self-determination against the external hegemonic powers but they suppressed internal ethnic minorities that attempted to construct their own vernacular literatures as expressions of their own "imagined communities." The German national literature that Friedrich Schlegel championed in the service of Metternich was rejected by the Hungarian national awakening that was, *nota bene,* inspired by Herder and the German romantics. In turn, this Hungarian project of national literature tried to suppress the Croatian, Romanian, Slovakian, and other ethnic projects of national literature, which developed their own (set of) national poets, texts and institutions.

III. Historiographical Issues

Not all literary histories written in the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century were histories of a nation's literature. But almost all histories of cultures, genres, and literary periods, were also limited to a single nation or language, and the handful

of comparative literary histories, even the magnificent comparative histories of Mihály Babits and Antal Szerb, written in the 1930s, ignored the literature of East-Central Europe. The only regional history so far is Karl Dietrich's German compilation from 1911. There are two main reasons for this glaring omission. First, Western scholars know too little about East-Central European languages and literatures. Friedrich Schlegel's example to devote one of his 1812 Vienna lectures to the literatures of Northern and Eastern Europe (229-50), making use of his smattering of freshly learned Hungarian (237), found no followers. Second, East-Central European comparatists have traditionally focused on the region's ties with the West. There are numerous studies on Hungarian/German, Polish/French, Romanian/Italian and other East/West relations, but few that interrelate the Hungarian, Polish and Romanian literatures. The Soviet-enforced co-operation between the countries after Word War II led to a preparatory Budapest conference on such a volume in 1962, but the project did not get off the ground. No co-operation of East-European literary scholars emerged that would compare with the economic co-operation of their countries in the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON). Today, intra-regional research seems to be done only in Hungary and more recently in Romania; a comparative literary history of Mitteleuropa is being prepared by Zoran Konstantinovic and Friedrun Rinner in German. The co-operation of so many scholars in the present project is therefore unprecedented.

A history of the literary cultures in East-Central Europe cannot (and should not) take upon itself the task of resolving the region's profound political and ideological problems. But it cannot ignore them either, for they crop up everywhere, starting with the very choice of the region's name. To choose the term East-Central Europe instead of Mitteleuropa, Eastern Europe, or some other historically loaded one is to opt for a relatively clean slate. What we may call the "future-directedness" of the term may be an asset rather than a liability. It implies that East-Central Europe is no geographical or political given but rather an invention whose reality must be constructed out of linguistic, religious, and ethnic elements that were differently grouped in the past and may,

indeed, be grouped by others in the future differently from the way we propose it. East-Central Europe is, like the nation states, an *imagined community* in Benedict Anderson's sense (15). Constructing its literature means reconceptualizing the existing literatures and their national histories. Optimally, such a reconceptualization may become a significant contribution to the social and political construction of the region: just as the writing of national literary histories participated in the invention of nations, so too, the writing of a history of East-Central Europe may participate in the region's invention. Our hope accords with the claim of contemporary theory that images and texts shape rather than merely reproduce the social world and its institutions, that nations are "imagined communities" (Anderson), that East Europe was *invented* (Wolff), and the Balkan was *imagined* (Todorova).

Whether nations are invented, and, if so, to what extent, is, of course, a matter of dispute. Leaving aside those extremists who base ethnicity (and hence nationhood) on biology, there are many who believe that the unity of modern nations rests on language. But this widely held Humboldtian view has become increasingly intenable in the light of the emerging multi-lingual nations on the one hand, and the splitting of monolingual national cultures on religious and other grounds, on the other. India has eighteen official languages, South Africa eleven, Belgium and Switzerland three; a great many other countries (among them Sweden, Romania, Italy, and the United States) have significant linguistic minorities. Multilingualism makes for conflicts, yet most of these nations represent viable political entities and historical realities. In turn, language is often insufficient to keep nations together. Witness the distinct national filiations of the Dutch and Flemish communities, or the recent splitting of Croatia and Slovakia from Serbia and the Czech Republic. In short, language is an important but by no means general foundation for modern nationhood.

Perceiving East-Central Europe and its literature as a construction does raise a host of epistemological questions however. Seeing a political and cultural entity as a human product will detach it

from nature, but makes legitimation more difficult. Why is one historical construction preferable to another? Is an East-Central European literary history trustworthier than the national histories to which it responds? Does it offer a better account of the literatures? Does "better" make sense here?

Questions of this kind turned David Perkins generally skeptical about writing literary histories today. In his view, literary historians traditionally sought to explain "why literary works acquired the character they have and why the literary series evolved as it did" (13), but such explanations cannot be convincing if the representation is seriously incomplete or lacking in objectivity (13). How can one assume, as most scholars do today, that literary histories are, at best, "hypothetical representations" and "provisional statements," while tacitly assuming also "that the past had a being, a reality, was so and not otherwise" (14)? If the latter is true, then each new plausible version of the past can be viewed as a gain; without this assumption "knowledge of the past could be said to change but not to increase, and the latest . . . *Columbia Literary History of the United States* (1987) would not be more reliable than the first one in 1829" (15-16). According to Perkins, plausible explanations must be based on a social consensus as to what constitutes plausibility, and if such a consensus is no longer possible in contemporary society, literary history becomes impossible.

Perkins may well be right that histories based on consensus are no longer possible. But let us not forget that every consensus in national literary histories (if there was one) had to be paid with inter-national confrontations. Was there ever a trans-national consensus? And does the impossibility of consensus today mean the end of *all* literary history? The epistemological assumptions of the volume here presented differ from those that Perkins regards as a sine qua non for writing literary histories. That the past had a "reality, was so and not otherwise" may be true in some abstract sense. But this "reality" is available to human perception and understanding in a perspectival way only. To believe in a reality

nd to say at the same time that this is available only via hypothetical representations," "provisional statements," or listorical constructions is no contradiction. Practical problems rise, of course, if we are confronted with alternative and even conflicting representations, and these problems are especially bothersome in histories of literature, whose raw material already consists of representations: "reality" for a literary history is not the battle of Kosovo but the various narrative representations that various people made for a number of ideological and aesthetic reasons.

Since "reality" consists of an endless sea of relevant material, historians of literary history (indeed all historians) confront the double task of making a selection and interconnecting the selected materials in a history. Perkins may be right that we can no longer agree on universal standards whereby we can decide that one historical representation is better than another, because different individuals and groups have different scales of values and different frames of judgement. Yet the need for historical accounts, as Perkins well recognizes, has by no means diminished. How can we reconsider the matter?

Comparing national and comparative literary histories, we should perhaps talk about paradigm change rather than progress. An East-Central European literary history represents a perspectival change, a *Gestaltswitch* analogous to the famous conversion of a duck drawing into a rabbit (Kuhn 111 ff.). The rabbit is neither better nor more authentic than the duck, and switching to it cannot be labeled as progress in an absolute sense, although certain observers in certain situations may prefer one or the other. Kuhn himself stressed that the histories of scientific revolutions are always written by the victors who want to portray the revolution as progress. Whether he was ready to surrender the idea of scientific progress remains unclear (160 ff.). In any case, he did believe that progress took place within paradigms and that the permanent competition of paradigms prevented progress in the arts and the humanities.

Does a regional history represent progress with respect to the national ones? Not if we measure progress by sheer quantity of

information. The new perspective will retrieve and reevaluate some lost data, but its generality and guiding ideas will necessarily impose principles of selection upon it. Looking at the literature of East-Central Europe from a regional rather than national perspective is a paradigm change related to the real revolution that brought about the collapse of the Soviet block and introduced the ideas of Western liberalism, capitalism, and George Soros into the region. Some people in East-Central Europe have refused to participate in our literary history because they distrust these ideas, but the volume is not just another Western conceptualization of the Eastern Other. East-Central European contributors constitute now a substantial majority in it, and in any case, location of residence does not by itself determine a mindset.

In this sense, the primary inspiration for the project is an ethical imperative rather than an epistemological hunger. For us, pace Perkins, the crucial question is not whether literary history is *possible,* but whether it can serve morally and politically desirable ends. Good literary histories, like all other forms of history, do not merely present new facts and explanations. More importantly, they recontextualize known information and explanations from the perspective of the present and within a vision of the future. Literary histories always incorporate tensions between past, present, and future; they are good if they reconsider the past from a contemporary and future perspective. A literary history of East-Central Europe will make sense if it furthers, however little, the communication between the peoples of East-Central Europe. The very co-operation of a wide range of scholars in the project has no doubt been already a small step in this direction.

IV. Literary Topographies of East-Central Europe

As Edward Soja put it succinctly, "It is space, more than time, that now hides consequences for us" (94). The events that have unfolded since the fall of the Berlin Wall bear out Soja's warning: the post-Cold War period has freed our imagination from traditional ideological polarizations, but has often replaced

them with nationalistic or ethnocentric concepts that promote violent divisions. Much of this new ethnic separatism has emerged in direct reaction to the pressure of the First World's "globalizing" ideologies. The new tensions between global interdependency and ethnocentrism, First World centers and Third World peripheries indicate a state of crisis at the level of the frameworks that we use to relate to each other. Therefore, we need to reexamine the implications of spatial definitions that can become contentious, creating the sort of crises we have witnessed recently in Bosnia or Kosovo. This type of work is especially important in the case of East-Central European cultures that all too often have been held hostage to conflicting mappings, either enforced on them or of their own making.

There is an ongoing confusion regarding the real and imagined maps of East-Central Europe. Its cartography reflects complex processes of negotiation between Western Europe's tendency to remain flexible and expanding and the equally strong need felt both by Western and Eastern Europe to define their cultural specificity in terms that opposed "Occidentalism" to "Orientalism," "Catholicism" to "Orthodoxy," Christianity to Judaism and the Islam. This mental polarization was subsequently challenged by integrative-federalist projects, political unions, or cross-cultural hybrids (Greek Catholicism in Eastern Europe, Latinity in Romania, "oriental" influences in Western music, "Eastern" hybridization of Western metropolitan centers, etc.) that cut across the imaginary dividing line between Eastern and Western Europe. And yet, no matter how porous or chimerical, cultural oppositions have a tendency to perpetuate themselves, "pitting one place against another, closing down this space, fortifying that space, . . . and exploiting the place of the Other" (McLeod 85). It is in the nature of boundaries to insist on separation even as they articulate a connection.

As an interface between competing religions and cultural ideologies, East-Central Europe has always felt the pressure to redefine itself by streamlining its past and integrating its ethnic complexities into some coherent concept of regionalism or Europeanism. Not surprisingly, most of these efforts have created

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new divisions in the very act of integrating differences. I
Milan Kundera's well-known 1984 essay "The Tragedy of Centr
Europe," the region features as the most European part of Europ
made up of families of small peoples not determined by geograph
but by culture and destiny. But this idealized image is obtaine
through a double act of differentiation: Central Europe is oppose
both to Eastern Europe, embodied for Kundera in an orthodo
pan-Slavic Russia that missed the two defining moments o
modern Europe, the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, and to
post-war Western Europe "barbarized" by the American politic
and cultural influences. Even as he tries to retrieve a Centr
Europe rendered invisible by the Cold War polarization, Kunde
creates new divisions that transform Central Europe into a solita
island rather than a connecting bridge; a utopia rather than
reality: "Central Europe is not a state: it is a culture or a fat
Its borders are imaginary" (35). In a response to Kundera, th
poet Joseph Brodsky took him to task for trying to be "mo
European than the Europeans themselves" (31) and creating
false opposition between civilized anti-Slavic Slavs (the Czech
and aggressive pan-Slavic Slavs (the imperialist Russians). B
Brodsky's own perspective enhances the divide: in his descriptio
Central Europe can be regarded simply as a region of Wester
Asia. That these divisions are not simply academic has becon
painfully clear several years into the new round of Balkan wa
that have opposed Catholic Slavs against Orthodox Slavs, ar
Orthodox Slavs against Muslim Slavs and non-Slavs.

The models proposed from the West have not been mo
helpful. Instead of integrating East-Central Europe under
common European agenda, they have insinuated new ideologic
divisions that split this region along religious, geographic
cultural "fault" lines. For example the "Rome versus Byzantiur
article published by Peter Michielson in the Dutch daily newspap
NRC Handelsblad (30 October 1999), urges us to accept a ne
division of the former Soviet block between "decent" democraci
and market economies in the Baltic States, Poland, Hunga
the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia and Croatia, on the o
hand, and uncertain democracies and capitalist economies

Russia, Byelorussia, the Ukraine, Moldavia, Romania, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Macedonia and Albania, on the other. The author reinforces this division by reinventing the old schism between Rome and Byzantium. A simplistic opposition between a basically retrograde Orthodox Church, and the allegedly progressive Catholic and Protestant Churches is invoked to justify the new dividing line that splits Europe like a white scar, also cutting across present-day Romania and whatever is left of Yugoslavia, dismembering them, and leaving behind the new religious Iron Curtain two postwar allies of the West, Greece and Turkey. In addition to reinforcing old stereotypes that cast the peoples of the Balkans, Russia, Byelorussia, and the Ukraine as Western Europe's others, such a perspective distorts history, wiping out the memory of the Ancient Greek democracy, overlooking the significant role that Byzantium played in preserving the Greco-Roman heritage and synthesizing it with oriental influences, as well as the aspirations to European reintegration that the countries of the Balkans have periodically felt while defending the South-Eastern margin of the Continent against the Ottomans. What is even more disturbing about such intellectual exercises in division is that they almost always translate into political partitioning. Michielson's article justifies de facto the idea of a "Schengen-Europe," cut short east of Hungary and South of Poland.

The work of rearticulating the history of East-Central European literatures around consistent comparative principles must include therefore a reexamination of such ideological mappings (and what mappings are not ideological?), in order to find ways to break across old or new division lines. Our work must begin by de-emphasizing monologic concepts of literary development (national traditions, unified periods and trends, organic histories). In terms of our topographic options, we will have to move from the Heideggerian "dream of a harmonious and unified culture . . . rooted in one particular place" (Miller 55) to "a not so totalizing or totalitarian" understanding of literary topography as open to "potentially limitless [and provisional] mappings" (281), which decenter and "hypertextualize" space. More specifically, we could

focus on those geocultural interfaces (crossroads, borderlands, multicultural cities and regions) that foreground the interaction of various local entities, as well as the dialogue of larger cultural paradigms (Eastern and Western, traditional and innovative, native and foreign). Such refocusing would move us "beyond a [conflictive] dialectic of identity and difference" (Spariosu 155), allowing us to understand the culture of a particular area or historical period as dialogic, a product of interethnic and intercultural cooperation.

The projected *History of the Literary Cultures in East-Central Europe* proposes to do just this, retrieving those areas of intercultural convergence obfuscated by nationalistic treatments of literature. Without neglecting areas of disjunction and conflict, our contributors intend to foreground the historical "conjunctures" as well as topographic interfaces that have encouraged the interaction of various local entities, as well as the dialogue across the larger provinces of Europe (Eastern and Western, Northern and Southern). A particularly productive example of an interactive cultural space is offered by what we can call "marginocentric cities." These are multiethnic nodal cities like Vilnius/Wilno/Vilna, Cernăuți/Czernowitz, Danzig/Gdańsk, Lviv/Lwów/Lemberg, Sibiu/Hermanstadt, Timişoara/Temesvar/Temesburg, Ruschuk/ Ruse, Shkodra/Işkodra/Skadar, Dubrovnik, and Trieste—to name only a few—that at favorable historical conjunctions have rewritten the national cultural paradigm from the margin, ascribing to it a dialogic dimension, both internally (in dialogue with other ethnic traditions) and externally (in dialogue with larger geocultural paradigms). It is their very marginality, we may add, as well as their multiethnic composition that has allowed these cities to look simultaneously to both East and West, establishing a fertile nexus between cultural traditions. Such cities encourage a de/reconstruction of national narratives, a hybridization of styles and genres, and alternative social and ethnic relations. They often represent centers of modernization and pluralization in the area, even if—as four of the essays submitted to our volume, Alexander Kiossev's on Plovdiv, Katarzyna Jerzak's on Gdańsk, George G Grabowicz's on Lwów, and Tomas Venclova's on Vilnius, point

out—their victories are temporary and contested, mixing the "myth of division" with the "myth of connection." As Cornel Ungureanu, founding member of the "Third Europe" research group in Timişoara, has argued elsewhere, provincial cities such as Timişoara, Zagreb, Novi Sad, Cernăuţi, Oradea, Lugoj, Braşov, and Bratislava, have often resisted not only the nationalistic redefinition of boundaries after World War I, but also imperialistic, pan-Germanic definitions of Mitteleuropa, opposing to them a more genuinely polycentric concept of culture (Ungureanu 57). Even metropolitan centers like Belgrade, Bucharest, Budapest, or Prague (as the essays submitted by Svetlana Slapsak, Mihaly Szegedy-Maszák, Monica Spiridon, or Veronica Ambrus suggest) have functioned at times as "liminal cities" and "magnetic fields" that interface Eastern and Western cultural paradigms in a continuous though not necessarily equal dialogue (the Eastern or "oriental" input functioning often as the tolerated other).

The "marginocentric cities" represent a challenge not only to traditional models of linear and totalizable historiography, disrupting them with their ex-centric evolutions, but also to literary representation itself. To apply Alexander Gelley's insightful analysis of modern urban topographies to our discussion, such cities function as partly non-totalizable "aggregates" that "challenge textual articulation. [They] induce a kind of vertigo, a blockage at the level of representability" (240). Representing a marginocentric-multiethnic city involves trying to accommodate an inexhaustible topographic, political, cultural-religious, and imaginary spectacle. The resulting "city text" (240) problematizes both our representational practices and our ideological definitions of a modern city. In the case of East-Central Europe, representations of marginocentric cities foreground the formative narrative of Western modernity, simultaneously imitating and questioning it. The East-Central European "city-text" harkens back to the Enlightenment concept of urbanity (descriptions of Timişoara linger on its array of restaurants, cafés and theaters that exude a small-scale Viennese atmosphere; and Bucharest was at one time called the "Paris of the Balkans"), but it also challenges the techno-rationalistic discourse of the Western city. Anticipating

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the postcolonial/postmodern redefinition of the Western city as multifaceted and decentered as a result of immigration, East-Central European literary representations have often emphasized the heteroglossic potential of marginocentric cities, bringing together in odd juxtapositions center and periphery, nature and culture, reality and fiction. Even though, as Kiossev's essay in the volume reminds us, the plurivocality and multiculturality of the East-Central European cityscape does not always translate into a multicultural text, it nevertheless puts significant obstacles in the path of the writer's effort to streamline the city and erase cultural difference.

Equally important for facilitating a cross-cultural dialogue have been those larger topographic interfaces (crossroads, borderlands, multiethnic regions) that cut across national boundaries, rendering them permeable to the flow of transnational messages. Examples of this can be found along the intercultural corridor of the Danube, explored for our "History of the Literary Cultures in East-Central Europe" by Roxana Verona and Nikola Petković; or in the large area between the Oder-Neiss, Poland, the old Austrian-Hungarian Empire, the Pale of Settlement in Tsarist Russia and Southern Romania associated with the more or less autonomous Ashkenaz culture of the East-Central European Jewry studied by Seth Wolitz. They can also be found within areas that we usually connect with a national paradigm, such as the present territory of Albania that is for Robert Elsie the epitome of the "hybrid soil of the Balkans," allowing for a dialogic development of Albanian literature at the interface of Christianity and Islam, Latin-speaking West and Greek-speaking Byzantine Empire; or the Croatian cultural topography that in Vladimir Biti's description has always interplayed a geographic "up" and "down," which translates further into an "up-universe" of utopia and a "down-universe" of realism and retrenchment. While foregrounding the intercultural dialogue within these regions, these essays are careful not to idealize their transnational impetus: both Verona and Petković, for example, point out contradictions in the way the Danube corridor was perceived up-course and down-course, resulting in a hierarchical split between a "Mitteleuropa" Danube and an "other," more oriental Danube; Petković also discusses the different perceptions

that people North and South of the Danube had of the Habsburg Empire, as either a quasi-federalist or a totalitarian system, and Guido Snel emphasizes the contradictory nature of the literary cultivation of the Pannonian myth, which features both as an imaginary home and a space of homelessness.

On the basis of this and other essays that have become part of our project, we can argue that regionalism has functioned (however briefly) as an alternative to the national centralization of East-Central European cultures both in the nineteenth century, when these cultures went through a process of nation-building, and again after the World War I and II. In what Virgil Nemoianu has called the "Biedermeier" phase of post-romanticism and early realism, the beginning of a "collaborative" model can be discovered in the multi-ethnic areas of Central Europe (parts of Transylvania, Banat, Slovakia, Bucovina, etc.). Under the impact of cultural regionalism, various ethnic groups developed an interest in each others' local cultures that led, if not to sustained collaboration, at least to a respectful coexistence (see Nemoianu, "A Biedermeier Cultural Intertextuality in Transylvania"; also "Transylvania: The Dialectics of Conflict and Tolerance," an essay prepared for our volume). A similar example can be found in the multiethnic region of the Banat, examined in Marcel Cornis-Pope's essay on Timişoara. Beginning in the eighteenth century, this region inhabited by Romanians, Serbs, Germans, Hungarians, Jews, Slovaks, Turks, and Armenians, developed a genuine "transethnic" East European civilization (see Neumann, *Identităţi*). As the great "turning plate" between Vienna and Constantinople, the Banat area redefined Europe itself as an intercrossing of multiple traditions, rather than a homogeneous cultural space. In the late eighteenth and nineteenth century, for example, not only intellectual leaders but also craftsmen and farmers shared several languages. Romanian's first important novelist, Ioan Slavici (1848-1925) grew up at the interface between Transylvania and the Banat with the conviction that one needed to relate to each individual's ethnic culture and language. The multilingual press of Timişoara shared a similar conviction at the beginning of World War I, maintaining a surprising neutrality in

its reports (e.g., these reports deplored the collapse of the Central European empire but did not vilify its enemies such as the Serbs). As Victor Neumann puts it, "If not entirely a Mitteleuropa, [the Banat was] in any case a Kleineeuropa, synthesizing the civilizations of the East and West" (*Tentaţia* 225).

Regionalism continued to play a lingering centrifugal role through the first half of the twentieth century in areas of Bessarabia, the Ukraine, Transylvania, Banat, Bosnia, Slovakia, resisting the program of national centralization coming from Moscow, Bucharest, Belgrade or Prague. The process of nation building in these regions involved a negotiation of tensions between nationalism and regionalism, central politics and local patriotism. Regionalism often worked as a corrective, turning potentially chauvinistic projects into multicultural ones. A good example is provided by John Neubauer's essay on Béla Bartók's search for the ethnic roots of Hungarian culture, which—once Bartók realized that most of the Hungarian peasant music was formed by means of constant interaction with the music of other peoples in the region—was turned into a campaign to collect and study Slovak, Romanian, Serbian, Ruthenians, and even Turkish and Arab folk songs. Unfortunately, under the homogenizing pressures of both right-wing and left-wing dictatorships, the regionalist impulse in East-Central Europe was seriously eroded after World War II, becoming a negligible counter-force in most areas of the communist bloc. The collapse in 1989 of the nationalistic phase of late communism has released again these regional forces, returning an interest to the East-Central European region rendered invisible by the Cold War polarization. But it has also brought to the surface ethnocentric resentments that had lain dormant for several decades of socialist amnesia.

In the current context of new interethnic conflicts and idiosyncratic divisions of East-Central Europe, the work undertaken by our various contributors will fortunately be able to retrieve those areas of intercultural convergence obfuscated by nationalistic and confrontational agendas. The good news is that our work does not take place in a vacuum: similar efforts to provide alternative, non-nationalistic mappings are being

undertaken in East-Central Europe by several groups of scholars (some represented also in our "History of the Literary Cultures in East-Central Europe") who are attempting to recover the idea of a multicultural "Third Europe" (Spiridon 31) as a buffer between countries with hegemonic ambitions and as a response to local ethnocentrisms. For these scholars, East-Central Europe at its best is not a fault line but a "region of convergencies, a territory where the civilizations of Central and South-Eastern Europe interplay[ed] to generate a multiple internal dialogue, on the one hand, and a great European dialogue, on the other" (Neumann, *Tentația* 223).

V. The Nodal Concept of an East-Central European Literary History

> Encyclopedic literary history deliberately forfeits coherence, and narrative cannot express its subject with the required complexity. (Perkins 20)

It may be useful to position our project in relation to other recent innovative literary histories. The ICLA series on the history of literatures in the European languages has been running since 1967; in recent years the productivity has greatly improved and the end is now in sight. But conceptual problems persist. The comparative and interdisciplinary approach has enormously expanded the material; scholars who can cope with a vast multilingual and multidisciplinary material are very hard to come by. Earlier (and to lesser extent even recent) volumes in the series solved this problem by commissioning essays on individual countries, but this abandons the notion of a genuinely comparatist ideal. Recent volumes try to avoid the pitfall of parallel national essays, but now run the risk of losing their genuinely historical character, becoming a random collection of essays on topics that may or may not be historical.

Denis Hollier's *A New History of French Literature* (1989) has similar problems, and the expanded French version (1993), simply

dropped the term "history" from the title, which reads now: *De la littérature française.* Hollier did away with the overarching narrative, substituting for it (in the French version) 206 essays, each of them attached to a particular event in a particular year. The independently conceived essays are unevenly distributed along the temporal axis. The authors hoped to achieve thereby an effect "of heterogeneity that escapes the linearity of traditional literary histories" (xix). The new approach disassembles the presentation of authors and periods, but retains a modicum of historicity by offering the essays in a chronological order. Hollier considers this an alternative both to the alphabetical order of encyclopedias, and to historical narration, which, according to him, creates artificially homogeneous genealogies (xix). Hollier's volume proposes to present French literature "as a complex historical and cultural field," whose study from various angles was made possible by contemporary criticism (xix).

One sympathizes with Hollier's intent to disperse some of the traditional narrative and authorial unities, and one welcomes the attempt at perspectival representation. But the resultant work is too loose and chaotic, because Hollier and his collaborators assume that the reader already has a sense of the overarching narrative, partly because they make little use of a major new method, namely reception theory. This could have offered precisely a way to present disparate viewpoints in an orderly fashion. The modes of reception one misses may be called *auto-reception* and *hetero-reception,* the former referring to those instances where a culture reinterprets, reappropriates, and even constructs its own literary heritage. Hollier's volume misses the opportunity in a double way. By giving little attention to the presentations in earlier French literary histories, the accounts tend towards a one-dimensional "this is how it was." The second missing mirror is that provided by the other nations and cultures. One need not turn the national into a comparative history. One could offer a variably refracted image of French literature by employing an international team of contributors. Hollier does indeed rely heavily at refractive images provided by contributors from the United States and Canada, and in the revised French version

he also includes a smattering of British ones. But the choices seem arbitrary, determined by pragmatic rather than theoretical considerations. There are no German, Italian, Scandinavian, Russian or other contributors. While it would be silly to plead for equal representation, without a broader international perspective Hollier misses his self-designed goal of multi-perspectivism.

Inclusion

National literary histories tend to aim for encyclopedic inclusiveness, but they shape the material in terms of a national conception. A new history must try to escape the Scylla and Charybdis of sprawling inclusiveness and constrictive narration, fair representation and selective national bias. Our history of East-Central European literature must be selective, both because it cannot include everything that the national histories have amassed and because its new perspective demands a refocusing of attention. But it will not try to erase everything that the national histories have compiled and constructed. The comparative paradigm complements rather than replaces the national one. Having competing paradigms in the writing of literary history is normal (as indeed, according to critics of Thomas Kuhn, it is normal even within the hard sciences). Our regional history will attempt to recuperate what in Renan's sense the national perspectives suppressed and excluded: it will "re-dialogize" the region's literature by rediscovering the minority literatures, including the transnational literatures in German and Yiddish, and giving special attention to multilingual figures, translations and other modes of cultural mediation. It should reveal that national impulses often led to regional perspectives. Thus, for instance, Antal Szerb's history of Hungarian literature (1934) was commissioned by a Hungarian society in Transylvania to cultivate the Hungarian tradition in what became then a Romanian province, but it became so cosmopolitan that the extreme right banned it when it assumed power in Hungary.

Narration

An East-Central European history cannot adopt the causal, organicist, and teleological structure that was typical for the national histories. Instead, events in the new history will be overdetermined, allowing for the possibility that literary events and phenomena may be associated with different alternative antecedents. Furthermore, it will have no overarching narrative, lest the impression that some "organic" development interconnects the elements. Of the four parts (see Table of Contents), only the first, temporal one, is chronologically structured, but even here the scenario is projected in reverse, moving backwards from the most recent. The narratives of the remaining three parts (on space, institutions, and figures) function as *microhistories* in Carlo Ginzburg's sense, i.e., as localized and situated stories that cannot be easily read as symbols or synecdoches of an overarching organic system. Like Ginzburg's microhistories, the present volume attempts to recuperate lost voices; the position of these voices to be recuperated and the method of their recuperation differ, of course, radically. The concept of microhistory is most relevant to our project above all because it presents partial narratives, and maintains a skeptical attitude with respect to overarching historical generalizations. Thus, for instance, in telling the story of the clown and distiller Constantino Saccardino, Ginzburg and Marco Ferrari provide an "extremely circumscribed and not generalizable" answer to questions about his general culture and historical period (Muir 11). Microhistories, for Ginzburg, are not illustrations of some already existing macrohistorical rules. Similarly, the individual sections and parts of our volume will not be forced into a single narrative. In contrast to Ginzburgian microhistories, and in deviation also from several recent literary studies, social, political, and cultural history will, however, be included in a limited sense only: in this volume, "literary culture" will be limited primarily to the institutions specific to literature. Extra-textual dimensions will be represented only inasmuch as they enter literary themes, events involving the writers, and, last but not least, as institutions and events shaped by the literary imagination.

We are aware that such a resistance to totalization may result in a collection of arbitrarily selected and connected essays, especially since we have to face another obstacle to integration: the scarcity of true comparatists who could cover topics on a regional basis. All too often, we will have to present, against our better judgment, parallel national accounts. We hope, however, that this tendency will be balanced by the various introductions.

Our volume is structured in terms of a single concept, the node, but this term acquires different meanings in the different parts, corresponding to different conceptions of comparative literature. In Part I, the force of the temporal nodes (in some cases clusters) is to impose on the diachronic national narratives a regional-spatial perspective. In Part III and Part IV, Section 1, the terms indicate that the national projects on literature went through analogous processes and stages, though usually out of phase with each other and at different speeds. The homologous structures and processes did involve, however, genuine meeting points, since the analogous national processes resulted from adoptions of ideas, schemes, and programs from abroad. The national processes were interdependent.

Nodes as points of transmission foreground the process of reception, which may assume an autobiographical and intertextual mode. Autobiographical reception occurs in letters, diaries, autobiographies, travel descriptions and other documents of the self that incorporate observations on foreign literatures (several contributions in Part IV, Section 7); while intertextual reception occurs in the regional sharing of certain literary forms and movements. As in the case of Hollier, we may distinguish between *auto-* and *hetero-*reception, between reviving, reconstructing, and manipulating a culture's own older texts, as in the case of the nineteenth-century "discovery" of folk poetry and medieval literature, and adopting ideas and forms from abroad, which may, but doesn't necessarily, weaken national cohesion. Adopting ideas from abroad for national awakening had, for instance, been instrumental in shaping a national identity. Hetero-reception is at the heart of the present undertaking, which has to define itself step for step against earlier histories.

These modes of reception assume the existence of two separate, well-defined identities. Their independence is, as it were, the presupposition for the transactions between them. The third and most radical sense of node puts the presuppositions of the first two comparisons into question by deconstructing national identities. It points up internal differences and suggests that the apparently consistent structure turns out to be *hybrid* upon closer inspection. What the national literature projects tended to ignore, or label as alien "contamination" or "corruption," is shown here to be no less indigenous. In this last conception of the nodal, the meeting points become intra-national points of dispersion. Literary works, authors, regions, and ideas are more complex and multi-faceted than their reductive images within the national projects. A passage from Béla Bartók's essay "Music and Racial Purity," published in 1942 during his American exile, indicates that this "dispersive" concept of the node that is now fashionable in its postmodern guise has deeper historical roots. As we have seen, Bartók came to regard East-Central European peasant music as multi-ethnic; it did not express ethnic or racial essences but participated in "a continuous give and take of melodies, a constant crossing and recrossing," which gave impulse to the development of new styles (*Essays* 30). In contrast to North Africa, where Bartók saw no such exchange and cross-fertilization, East-Central Europe showed "an immense variety and a wealth of melodies and melodic types," and the "'racial impurity' finally attained" was definitely beneficial (*Essays* 30-31). Peasant music could remain alive only if no Chinese walls separated the people from each other: "A complete separation from foreign influences means stagnation: well-assimilated foreign impulses offer possibilities of enrichment" (*Essays* 31). Thus, for instance, the Rákóczi march, generally considered as quintessentially Magyar, contained "elements originating from the Arabic-Persian 'long melody,' Eastern European-Hungarian elements, and ornamental motives of Central European art music: quite a collection of the most heterogeneous elements!" (*Essays* 32).

Had Bartók stopped here, we could describe the present volume as "Bartókian." But the composer added an organicist

and residually essentialist remark, which points up not only the difference between his conception and ours, but also difficulties that representatives of the neighboring ethnic groups may have experienced when reading his piece: "Nevertheless, the way they [the multi-ethnic elements of the Rákoczi march] are transformed, melted, and unified presents as a final result a masterpiece of music whose spirit and characteristics are incontestably Hungarian" (*Essays* 32). But how can a history of interchange result in something "incontestably" ethnic and national? By focusing on the history of interchange, our volume will try to show that the belief in "incontestable" cultures is itself a heritage from the nineteenth century.

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History of the Literary Cultures in East-Central Europe: Junctures and Disjunctures in the 19th and 20th Centuries

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